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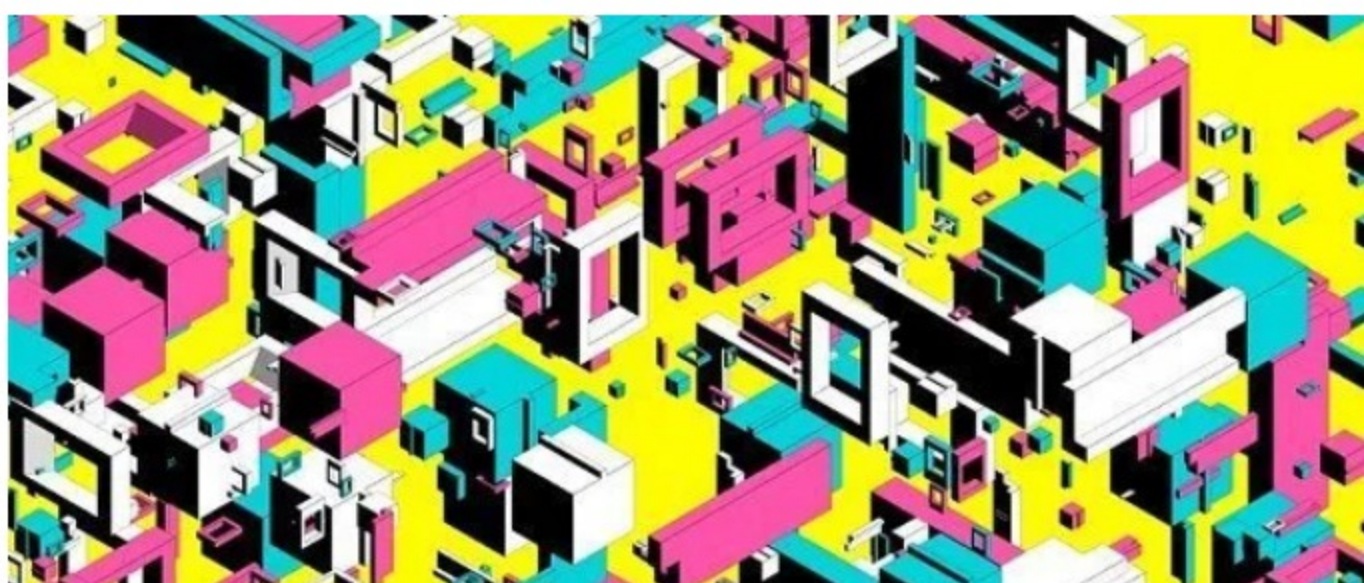
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Debt, Housing, Creative Solutions: Construct the Future at Hoxton Gallery

NATIVE'S HOXTON GALLERY SHOW DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE MODERN DEBT/HOUSING CRISIS, BUT LESS TYPICALLY, SUGGESTS SOLUTIONS

11/04/2016 Michael Eden Art, Features



With cool indie music playing to a packed out audience in the Hoxton's Gallery's atmospheric space the Native team put on an impressive and upbeat show.

It seemed poignant to arrive home yesterday evening from the *Construct the Future* exhibition in the Hoxton Gallery to a television half way through Question Time on which Irvine Welsh, the esteemed and refreshingly awkward writer of *Trainspotting* declared,

'Governments control people with debt and international power controls nations with debt; the banks were too big to fail but the people, well....'
– Irvine Welsh, *Question Time* BBC1 7/04/2016

This comes at a time when our own prime minister is under pressure for having investments which, shall we say, don't conform to our normal expectations (despite his already above average wealth and status as a home owner). More! More! More! The biggest debt most people have is either their rent, which is exuberantly high, especially in big cities and more so in London, or the mortgage which keeps everyone on tenterhooks until it's paid (indeed the 80s conservative government were well aware of how much easier people were to control when they acquired lots of personal debt – an observation behind the 'right to buy' initiative).

(*'Native' with a strong influence from Tiffany Philippou*)

London, as reported and much spoken about, is becoming another country with ordinary people either priced out by international investors looking to take advantage of our relatively stable rule of law or held to ransom by a 'for profit' rental market which is ruthless and biased towards landlords.

It's a problem, and one which Native, the team behind the *Control the Future* exhibition are keen to intervene in with their 'shared ownership' product and socially conscious sensibility. American psychologist Rollo May famously said, 'Depression is the inability to construct a future'. I'm not sure if this was the inspiration for the title but it certainly feels relevant. It's depressing that people can't afford to cultivate themselves, or perhaps even feed themselves because of personal debt and housing worry.

With the use of anti-depressants at an all-time high perhaps more practically-minded organisations or, dare we presume, government, should consider the May quote and make an effort to do just that. Construct at least a collective vision for homes and alleviate the weight bearing down on 80% of the population. How strange that this totally core human need for shelter and stability should remain in our technologically advanced time, without a solution.

The art on show at the exhibition is highly varied and it seemed selected to give an insight into the moral and political leanings of the curators

'Exhibited work includes: a wearable refugee shelter; a sustainable living tower inhabited with edible plants and fish; a digitised 3D model that envisions new spatial possibilities; an interactive musical installation for the London Underground, as well as zines, poems, essays, films and illustrations. There will also be a noticeboard with details of collectives and organisations that deal with some of the issues surrounding affordable housing in the UK.'

Tiffany Philippou and the Native team cited the influence of Jane Jacobs, a journalist and activist who campaigned throughout her life to improve the lot of people living in large cities. In this vein the artist Natalie Andrews, as well as contributing an aptly named and impressive painting 'landscape 5' from the series *Architecture of a Problem* created a petition which aims to improve the credit rating of most people who don't own a home by allowing their rent payments to contribute towards it.

'Landscape 5' from the series Architecture of a Problem by Natalie Andrews (view the entire series here <http://natalie-andrews-art.squarespace.com/> and sign the petition here, <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/125313>

In the painting, with its references to utopian building projects (the Sydney Opera House-like outline set against the hopeful blue sky) and games of chance, I recognised the housing estate noughts and crosses children's park installation from my time in Elephant and Castle, and south London is offset by anthropomorphic fleshy coloured dustbins (or are they vents?). In any case I took them to be us: not quite at the beautiful horizon but very much at the bottom with the pollution and grime and soon to evicted from even that lowly place. This piece seemed to encapsulate the curator's ethos and connect a lot of the worthy and noble ideas presented by the other more project-based pieces; my children for example, enjoyed collecting seeds from a central installation and this morning they planted them with enthusiasm.

I hope the Native team are able to make their intervention work and help people to have a home, they have certainly drawn attention to huge problem and, less typically, to a possible solution.

<http://www.tobenative.com/>



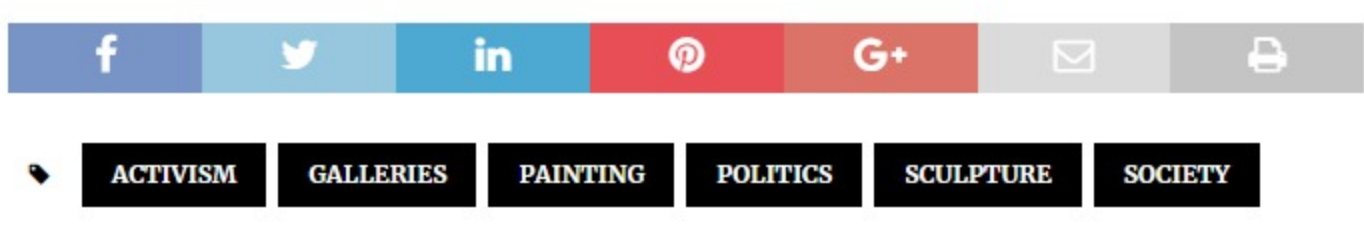
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About Michael Eden > 77 Articles

Michael Eden is the Arts Editor for Trebuchet Magazine, an artist and researcher working in London and the south east, his artistic practice is concentrated on painting and he divides his time between this and lecturing in art history and contextual studies.

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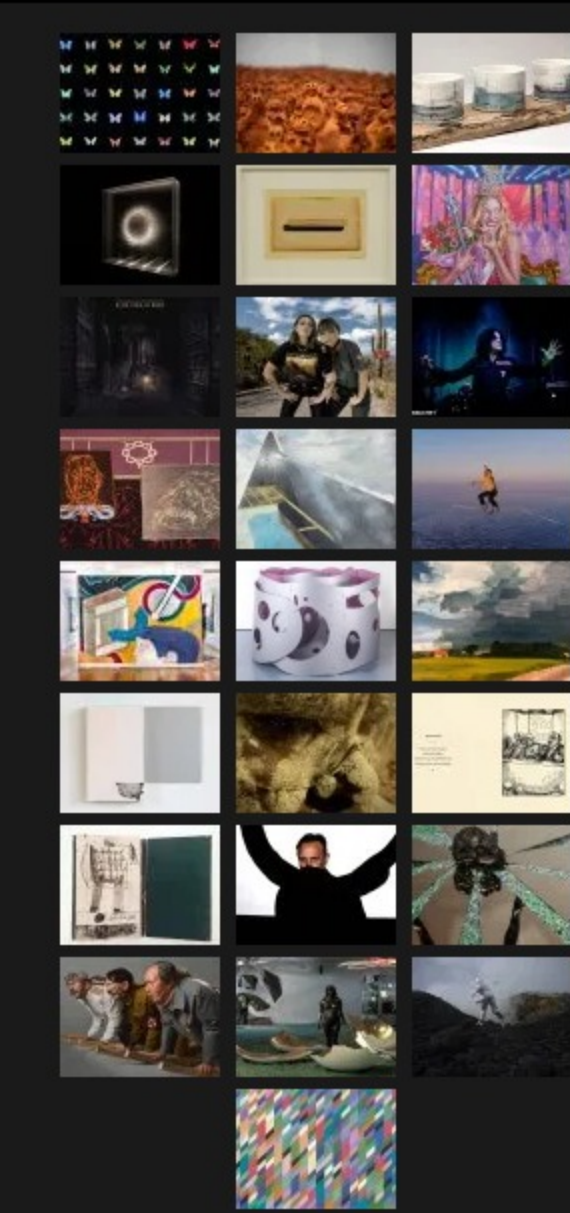
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